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File Code: 3420 **Date:** November 3, 2003
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Subject: Proposed Los Griegos and Pinabetosa Insect and Disease Prevention/Suppression Projects, Jemez and Coyote RDs (jemezrd) (coyoterd)

To: Forest Supervisor, Santa Fe NF

This letter provides evaluations for proposed FY 2004 insect and disease prevention/suppression projects on the Jemez and Coyote RDs. Dave Conklin of our staff and Andy Vigil (SFNF Zone Silviculturist) met on August 29 (Jemez RD) and October 1 (Coyote RD) to develop these projects. Tony Barela and Dave Lujan (Coyote RD) participated in the October 1 site visits. In addition to stands selected for the proposed treatments, the narrative below describes several additional stands that were examined but not included in the proposals, either because they were deemed lower priority or because the NEPA analysis is incomplete.

Los Griegos Project, Jemez RD

Based on a suggestion from District personnel, Andy and Dave first examined the recent Dollar Timber Sale area as a potential project site. This 93-acre ponderosa pine and mixed conifer stand, located about one mile south of the Sierra Los Pinos (Vallecitos) subdivision, had been harvested and thinned about two years ago. Although some residual dwarf mistletoe was observed in the southern portions, this stand was already well-thinned, so we would consider any additional treatment here to be a low priority at this time.

Unthinned stands to the south and east of the Dollar area appeared to be much better candidates for a project. These stands are in fact part of the planned and "NEPA-ready" 1,871-acre Los Griegos WUI project. A 250-acre area in the southern portion of this area has now been selected and proposed by Andy as an FY 04 prevention/suppression project.

Nearly all of this area is pure ponderosa pine forest. Although stand structure is variable, densities are consistently high throughout. About half of the area is more or less single-storied, consisting of pole and small sawtimber. The remainder tends to be multistoried, with a significant component of larger mature trees. Basal areas easily exceed 200 square feet/acre in many areas, and probably average over 150 ft^2 throughout. The last thinning appears to have been at least 25 to 30 years ago, based on the condition of the stumps. Site quality is good and may range from 80 to 100 in most portions. Small inclusions of aspen and Douglas-fir occur in very limited areas.

Ponderosa pine dwarf mistletoe is common and widespread in this area, and appears to occur in roughly half of the total acreage. There are some fairly extensive infection centers, especially in a research plot area (Northern Arizona University) located in the northern portion. Because of the high stem densities, some infections — especially where they are relatively light — are inconspicuous.

The proposed treatment is a low thinning that should reduce basal areas to 80 to 100 ft^2 in most areas. With careful attention to selection and marking, the treatment should provide successful disease management. In most areas, there appear to be sufficient numbers of quality "crop trees" for retention. We recommend removing as much of the mistletoe as possible without sacrificing the best trees. Lightly infected trees of good form and vigor greater than 4-5" dbh can serve as acceptable leave trees. All infected trees less than 4" dbh should be cut.

The proposed treatment would certainly improve overall tree growth and vigor and should reduce the susceptibility of the stand to bark beetle outbreaks. Prescribed burning, which is planned for at least part of this area after the thinning, could provide some further reduction in dwarf mistletoe infection. Overall, the proposed treatment should enhance forest health and reduce fire hazard in this WUI.

Pinabetosa Project, Coyote RD

Several stands known by District personnel to harbor dwarf mistletoe infestation were examined and prioritized in the development of this proposed project. The first area examined, known as the Banco area, is located along Forest Road 76, just south of the community of Gallina. Several ponderosa pine stands logged and thinned in the 1980s now display moderate to heavy levels of infection. Despite the disease, it appears that there are sufficient numbers of vigorous trees to maintain forest cover well into the future. Additional thinning of these areas, which are already relatively open, does not appear warranted at this time. Prescribed burning may be a good management option in these areas, however. The few remaining unthinned stands in the Banco area could potentially benefit from thinning, especially those with relatively light dwarf mistletoe infection. NEPA analysis has not been completed for this area.

The second area examined, known as Jarosa Aranda, is located along FR 103 and is adjacent to some private land. This 122-acre pine stand had been thinned about 15 to 20 years ago, but is clearly overstocked with small sawtimber and pole-size trees. Dwarf mistletoe infection is fairly extensive and appears to be at moderate intensity overall. Site quality is high. Following additional recon and analysis (NEPA), this area may be a good candidate for treatment, perhaps using a combination of low thinning and prescribed burning.

The areas ultimately selected for the proposed project are all on or near Pinabetosa Mesa (located 3 to 6 miles south of Coyote) in areas that have been commercially harvested within the past 2 to 3 years. Non-commercial follow-up thinnings have already been completed in some of the harvested areas, but a few of the remaining stands could clearly benefit from a final entry to remove excess and dwarf mistletoe-infected trees in the smaller size classes. These selected areas, a total of about 200 acres, include portions of Jarosa units 2 and 3, and portions of the Pinabetosa and Rat sale areas.

The Jarosa units are predominantly ponderosa pine, but are converting to mixed-conifer in some areas. These stands have light, scattered dwarf mistletoe infection in both the pine and Douglas-fir. Some of the remaining excess and infected trees here may be sold for vigas. The Rat sale area is mixed-conifer, with moderate infection in the Douglas-fir component. The Pinabetosa area is mostly ponderosa pine with moderate infection; much of this sale area was thinned this past summer, but about 40 acres (already marked) remain to be completed. Following completion of all thinnings in these areas, a large broadcast burn is planned to reduce fuel loading; this could potentially provide some additional disease control.

The final area examined (briefly) was the Mesa Polea area, located just southwest of Coyote in a designated WUI. This area includes stands of dense, multistoried, high-site ponderosa pine that would clearly benefit from thinnings to reduce fuel-loading and improve overall forest health. The Mesa Polea area may be an excellent candidate for insect and disease prevention/suppression projects in the upcoming years, once NEPA analysis is completed.

/s/ David A. Conklin (for)
DEBRA ALLEN-REID
New Mexico Zone Leader,
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cc: Andy Vigil, Leonard Lucero, Mailroom R3 Santa Fe